

*The Kingdom of Heaven is like
Payday in a Vineyard*
Troy Knight

TALK IT OVER

Key Scripture:

Matthew 19:25-30

25 The disciples were astounded. "Then who in the world can be saved?" they asked. 26 Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible." 27 Then Peter said to him, "We've given up everything to follow you. What will we get?" 28 Jesus replied, "I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.

Matthew 20:1-16

1 "For the Kingdom of Heaven is like the landowner who went out early one morning to hire workers for his vineyard. 2 He agreed to pay the normal daily wage and sent them out to work. 3 "At nine o'clock in the morning he was passing through the marketplace and saw some people standing around doing nothing. 4 So he hired them, telling them he would pay them whatever was right at the end of the day. 5 So they went to work in the vineyard. At noon and again at three o'clock he did the same thing. 6 "At five o'clock that afternoon he was in town again and saw some more people standing around. He asked them, 'Why haven't you been working today?' 7 "They replied, 'Because no one hired us.' "The landowner told them, 'Then go out and join the others in my vineyard.' 8 "That evening he told the foreman to call the workers in and pay them, beginning with the last workers first. 9 When those hired at five o'clock were paid, each received a full day's wage. 10 When those hired first came to get their pay, they assumed they would receive more. But they, too, were paid a day's wage. 11 When they received their pay, they protested to the owner, 12 'Those people worked only one hour, and yet you've paid them just as much as you paid us who worked all day in the scorching heat.' 13 "He answered one of them, 'Friend, I haven't been unfair! Didn't you agree to work all day for the usual wage? 14 Take your money and go. I wanted to pay this last worker the same as you. 15 Is it against the law for me to do what I want with my money? Should you be jealous because I am kind to others?' 16 "So those who are last now will be first then, and those who are first will be last."

Start **talking**. Find a conversation starter for your group.

- What was the best job you've ever had? What made it your favorite?

Start **thinking**. Ask a question to get your group thinking.

- **Read Matthew 19:25-30.** Was Peter's heart in the right place? What did Jesus mean by his statement in v. 30? Are you ever guilty of attempting to "make yourself great?" How?
- **Read Matthew 20:1-16.** Did those who were hired at 6am have a point? How is God's arithmetic different from ours?
- Troy told the story of Jeffrey Dahmer's salvation. Have you ever felt like the church member who said, "If Jeffrey Dahmer is in going to heaven, then I don't want to be there." Why? How can we combat/overcome those feelings?
- How do we keep from getting the mindset of a 6am worker? What do you do as a Christian to stay humble and grateful for salvation?

Start **sharing**. Choose a question to create openness.

- Describe a time when you witnessed God's favor on a marriage, job promotion, baby's arrival, or a family with great kids. Were you jealous or envious? Did you think they deserved it? How did you respond?
- Have you personally ever felt that you deserve blessings from God because of how you serve him or things you have done for Him? Share with the group. What was the outcome?
- The last will be first and the first will be last – Do you want to be first or last? God wants us to humble ourselves and serve Him willingly, not grudgingly. Are you willing to sacrifice and put yourself in the last place? In what specific areas do you need to be willing to be last?

Start **doing**. Commit to a step and live it out this week.

- Commit this week to seeking God and asking Him to show you where you need to serve others? What do you need to sacrifice personally?

Start **praying**. Be bold and pray with power.

- God, help us to use you as the example of how we are supposed to serve others. You gave Your life away for us. Please help us to do that same things for others. Give us humility and compassion when dealing with the people you have place in our path. - Amen

Start **digging**. For further study.

Question: "What is the meaning of the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard?"

Answer: This lengthy parable is found only in the gospel of Matthew. Jesus tells the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) in response to Peter's question in Matthew 19:27: "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" Peter wanted to know what reward would be given to those who give up everything to follow Jesus. In response, Jesus explains this truth about the kingdom of heaven.

Planting, maintaining and harvesting vineyards in first-century Israel was strenuous work requiring hard physical labor in the heat of summer. Often, additional laborers were required to get all the work done. The owner of this particular vineyard went to the marketplace at the first hour of the morning (6:00 a.m.) to find workers for the day. His offered wage of one denarius, a Roman's soldier's pay for a day, was generous indeed. The workers in the first group were more than happy to work for the generous wage.

As the day progressed and more workers were hired, the specific wage was not mentioned, but the landowner promised to pay "whatever is right." Apparently, the workers were sufficiently confident of the landowner's character that they trusted him at his word. Altogether, four groups of workers were hired, the last group just one hour before the end of the day. When the time came for the wages to be paid, the first group of workers saw the last group being paid a denarius and were naturally thinking they would be paid more since they had worked the longest. Their anger against the landowner spilled forth when they saw they would all be paid the same, even though they got exactly what they had agreed upon when they were hired. The landowner was forced to defend his actions to the first group, even though he had dealt with them in perfect fairness according to the contract.

The landowner, whose decision to pay all the workers the same was an act of mercy—not injustice—represents God, whose grace and mercy are shed abundantly upon those of His choosing. "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Romans 9:15-16). In the matter of salvation, His grace and mercy are given to those whose self-righteous works could never obtain it. We are all sinful and "fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), but His grace is sufficient to redeem all who believe. Whether God calls someone early or late in life to partake of His grace, the glory and praise for our salvation is His and His alone and in no way amounts to unfairness. Just as the landowner has a right to do what he wishes with his own money, so does God have the right to have mercy on whom He will have mercy.

The first group of workers in the vineyard resented receiving the same wage as the last group. Their attitude was similar to that of the Pharisees, who were incensed at Jesus' teaching that others could inherit a heavenly kingdom they thought was reserved for them alone. They despised Jesus for offering the kingdom to poor, oppressed, weak sinners whom He made equal to them. In verse 15, the landowner asks, "Is your eye evil because I am good?" The "evil eye" was a Hebrew expression referring to jealousy and envy. God's goodness and mercy produced in the self-righteous Pharisees the evil eye of envy. The rest of the workers received their wages without complaint or envy of others. In the same way, as Christians, we should rejoice when others come to the Savior, as we should rejoice in the service others render to Him. He is faithful to reward us for our service as He has promised, and how He rewards others should be of no consequence to us, nor should it affect our devotion to Him.

The message in verse 16, "the last will be first, and the first last," is that no matter how long or how hard a believer works during his lifetime, the reward of eternal life will be the same given to all—an eternity of bliss in heaven in the presence of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43), whose life of service was limited to a moment of repentance and confession of faith in Christ, received the same reward of eternal life as the apostle Paul. Of course, Scripture also teaches that there are different rewards in heaven for different services, but the ultimate reward of eternal life will be achieved by all equally.